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MILITARY ADDRESSEES ALSO FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS 1978: FRENCH COMMUNISTS IN POWER --
THE MUNICIPAL EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: "THE DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGE" (1973) OF COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF) LEADER GEORGES MARCHAIS ADDRESSED THE QUESTION OF ALTERNANCE IN POWER IN THE FOLLOWING WAY: "WE COMMUNISTS HAVE NO PROBLEM IN GUARANTEEING THE CONCEPT OF ALTERNANCE SIMPLY BECAUSE OUR REGIME WILL BE SO STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY THE COUNTRY AS TO SUFFOCATE REACTIONARY FORCES." ALTHOUGH MARCHAIS WAS TALKING OF THE PROSPECTS FOR A COMMUNIST FRANCE, HE COULD JUST AS WELL HAVE BEEN DESCRIBING THE PCF EXPERIENCE IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT WHERE HIS PREDICTION IS ALREADY A REALITY. THE COMMUNISTS NOW CONTROL 72 OF THE COUNTRY'S 221 LARGEST CITIES, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY THEY HAVE ALMOST NEVER LOST A MUNICIPALITY ONCE CONQUERED. HOW DO THEY DO IT? -- A QUESTION OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. THIS CABLE EXPLORES THE PROBLEM, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO HOW THE COMMUNISTS RUN ONE FRENCH CITY -- NIMES. IT CONCLUDES THAT THE PCF'S "SECRET" TO SUCCESS INCLUDES:

- HARD-WORKING PCF POLITICIANS AND PARTY MEMBERS WITH MORE RESOURCES AND MORE DEDICATION THAN COMPETING POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS;
- MAXIMUM EXPLOITATION OF MUNICIPAL MACHINERY TO FURTHER PARTY IMPLANTATION IN ALL SECTORS OF SOCIETY;
- A STRATEGY EMPHASIZING COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC

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INSTITUTIONS AND BOURGEOIS LEGALITY WHILE LIMITING LOCAL PROJECTS TO SMALL-SCALE BUT SUCCESSFUL UNDERTAKINGS AND BLAMING MUNICIPAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. MUNICIPAL IMPLANTATION: IN MARCH 1977, THE PEOPLE OF NIMES ELECTED A COMMUNIST MAYOR FOR THE THIRD TIME SINCE 1965, THUS GUARANTEEING AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF PCF CONTROL IN A CITY WHERE EVERYONE AGREES THAT COMMUNISM IS AN ABERRATION. IN FRANCE AS A WHOLE, THE PCF NOW CONTROLS SOME 1800 TOWN HALLS (WITH PS PARTICIPATION IN MOST MUNICIPAL COUNCILS), INCLUDING 72 OF THE 221 LARGEST CITIES (THOSE WITH OVER 30,000 POPULATION) AND IS INCLUDED IN UNION OF THE LEFT ADMINISTRATIONS IN ANOTHER 75-80 SOCIALIST CITIES. MOVING BEYOND TRADITIONAL CONCENTRATIONS OF STRENGTH(MOST NOTABLY THE PARIS SUBURBAN AREA), COMMUNIST GAINS IN MARCH 1977 OCCURRED IN ALMOST ALL SECTORS OF THE COUNTRY, LARGELY THANKS TO THE UNION OF THE LEFT STRATEGY WHICH BROUGHT SOCIALIST SUPPORT TO PCF CANDIDATES. THUS THE GROWING LIST OF COMMUNIST CITIES IN THE PROVINCES, WHICH BEGAN WITH LE

HAVRE AND NIMES IN 1965, NOW INCLUDES THE LIKES OF SAINT
ETIENNE, REIMS, BEZIERS, LE MANS, ETC.

2. PCF STRONG POINTS CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST URBANIZED
REGIONS (RHONE-ALPES, BOUCHES-DU-RHONE, NORD, PAS-DE-
CALAIS), ALTHOUGH (UNLIKE IN ITALY) THE PARTY REMAINS A
SUBURBAN PHENOMENON, LESS SUCCESSFUL IN THE REALLY LARGE
CITIES (OVER 100,000) BUT PROSPERING IN THE NEW TOWNS
AND HLM COMPLEXES (LOW COST PUBLIC HOUSING) OF THE SUR-
ROUNDING SUBURBS. THE END RESULT IS THAT ONE OUT OF

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EVERY TWELVE FRENCHMEN NOW LIVES IN A COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED COMMUNITY (ONE OUT OF FIVE IN THE PARISIAN DEPARTMENTS) AND MILLIONS OF OTHERS ARE GOVERNED BY SOCIALIST MAYORS WITH PCF MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS.

3. SELF-PERPETUATING POWER: NOT ONLY DO THE COMMUNISTS CONTROL NUMEROUS CITIES, BUT THEY INVARIABLY SUCCEED IN AUGMENTING THEIR POPULARITY SO THAT MOST MUNICIPALITIES QUICKLY BECOME VIRTUALLY IMPREGNABLE PCF BASTIONS. IN MARCH 1977, FOR EXAMPLE, THE PCF WAS REELECTED ON THE FIRST ROUND IN ALL 50 OF ITS LARGE CITIES, AN UNPRECEDENTED ELECTORAL ACHIEVEMENT (THE PS WON 31 OF 46 ON THE FIRST ROUND, GAULLISTS 11 OF 27 AND REPUBLICAN PARTY 6 OF 20). ONE SEARCHES IN VAIN FOR AN IMPORTANT CITY WHICH HAS TURNED OUT AN INCUMBENT PCF ADMINISTRATION, FINDING THE MOST "NOTABLE" EXAMPLES IN OBSCURE ACHERES (LOST IN 1971 BUT REGAINED IN 1977) AND IN EVEN MORE REMOTE LE MAS-D'AGENAIS, LOST IN 1977 AFTER 20 YEARS OF COMMUNIST RULE. THE OBVIOUS QUESTION IS HOW DOES THE PCF DO IT?

4. NOT A WORLD BEATER, BUT NOT BAD: WHILE THE COMMUNIST TRACK RECORD IN CITY GOVERNMENT IS NOT MARKED BY SPECTACULAR SUCCESS, NEITHER IS IT MARRED BY SCANDAL. MOST FRENCHMEN SEEM CONVINCED THAT PCF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IS ABOUT AVERAGE OR EVEN A BIT ABOVE AVERAGE BY NATIONAL STANDARDS, ALTHOUGH RESIDENTS OF COMMUNIST CITIES MORE FREQUENTLY CONSIDER THEIR OWN MUNICIPALITIES AS "MODELS", THANKS IN SOME MEASURE TO WELL-ORCHESTRATED PROPAGANDA EFFORTS BUT ALSO DUE TO HARD-WORKING PCF POLITICIANS.

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ITICIANS. THE COMMUNISTS DO ATTRACT A LARGER SHARE OF THE VOTE AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL THAN ELSEWHERE, IN PART BECAUSE THE POPULATION FEELS THAT LESS IS AT STAKE BUT

ALSO DEMONSTRATING A CERTAIN DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE IN
PCF ADMINISTRATION.

5. THE MUNICIPALITY IN NATIONAL STRATEGY: WHILE THE PARTY HAS NEVER ARGUED THAT THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM RUNS THROUGH THE CONQUEST OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT CONTROL OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION CAN BE OF IMMENSE VALUE IN ADVANCING PCF IDEAS AND, AS THE MOST VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF COMMUNIST INTENTIONS, IN REINFORCING OR CHANGING THE PARTY'S IMAGE. IN RECOGNIZING SUCH POSSIBILITIES, THE MUNICIPAL EXPERIENCE HAS NOW TAKEN ON A NEW AND MORE IMPORTANT ROLE, MOVING BEYOND THE SIMPLE IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE FIELD OF THE DISTANT PAST -- "THE MUNICIPAL SYSTEM OF BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY IS A TRICKERY WHICH IS TEN TIMES MORE ODIOS THAN THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM" -- TO BECOME A USEFUL INSTRUMENT WITH WHICH THE PARTY CAN DEMONSTRATE ITS DEDICATION TO DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES AND BOURGEOIS LEGALITY. WHEREAS PCF CITIES TRADITIONALLY SERVED SHORT-RANGE "REVOLUTIONARY" OBJECTIVES SUCH AS SUPPORTING THE WORKERS' STRUGGLES AND MAINTAINING CLOSE LINKS BETWEEN THE PARTY AND THE MASSES, MODERN COMMUNIST ADMINISTRATIONS PLAY TO POPULAR THEMES LIKE COMMUNAL DEMOCRACY (ATTRACTIVE TO THE MIDDLE CLASS), WHILE TRYING TO PROVIDE MORE CONCRETE RESULTS IN AMELIORATING THE DAILY LIVES OF THE WORKERS.

6. THE PCF HAS ALWAYS VIEWED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL STRATEGY AND STILL DOES SO TODAY. AS THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE DECREED IN 1976, COMMUNIST MUNICIPALITIES ARE "TO SERVE AS A LOCAL BASE FOR SUPPORTING A NATIONAL POLICY AND FOR PLACING EACH PARTICULAR PROBLEM IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF MARXIST THOUGHT AND PARTY PROPAGANDA." THEY PERFORM THAT FUNCTION WELL,
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PROVIDING READY FORUMS FOR PCF IDEAS AND SERVING AS CENTERS FROM WHICH PARTY INFLUENCE CAN EXPAND. MOREOVER, COMMUNIST CITIES FREQUENTLY PROVIDE A DIRECT ELECTORAL DIVIDEND IN A POLITICAL SYSTEM WHERE THE ACCUMULATION OF MANDATES IS A WAY OF LIFE. PATRONAGE AND OTHER PREROGATIVES OF MUNICIPAL POWER, ADDED TO AN ALREADY SUPERIOR PARTY ORGANIZATION AND PROPAGANDA MACHINE, PROVIDE ENOUGH POLITICAL LEVERAGE SO THAT SOME OBSERVERS PREDICT AS MANY AS TEN NEW PCF DEPUTIES IN 1978 AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE MUNICIPAL STEPPING STONE.

7. SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL: IN KEEPING WITH NATIONAL STRATEGY, LOCAL COMMUNIST LEADERS EMPHASIZE THAT MUNICIPAL OPTIONS ARE LIMITED AND THAT FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE CANNOT BE ACCOMPLISHED WHILE THE CAPITALIST STATE REMAINS IN

PLACE IN PARIS. CONSEQUENTLY, MUNICIPAL PROJECTS ARE
KEPG INTENTIONALLY SMALL, THUS AVOIDING THE POSSIBILITY

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OF FAILURE, WHILE BLAMING PROGRAMMATIC CONSTRAINTS ON THE PREFECT, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OR "CAPITALIST SOCIETY" IN GENERAL. CITY PROJECTS IN NIMES ARE TYPICAL, INCLUDING:

- THOSE AIMED AT IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE, PARTICULARLY OF THE LESS-FAVORED CLASSES, SUCH AS PUBLIC GRADENS, BETTER HOUSING, CULTURAL AND SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES;
- AND THOSE DESIGNED TO INCREASE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, NOTABLY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITTEES, EXTRA-MUNICIPAL COMMISSIONS BRINGING INTERESTED CIVIC GROUPS INTO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, AND A VAST ARRAY OF SEMI-PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS FOR EVERY FACET OF DAILY LIFE.

8. THE COMMUNIST MAYOR: THE CENTERPIECE OF MOST COMMUNIST MUNICIPALITIES IS A HARD-WORKING, EXTREMELY POPULAR MAYOR. IN MANY CASES, AS IN NIMES, THE MAYOR SERVES LARGELY AS A FIGUREHEAD ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE FRONT, LEAVING CITY MANAGEMENT IN THE HANDS OF PARTY ASSISTANTS (IN NIMES, THE FIRST ASSISTANT MAYOR IS ALSO HEAD OF THE PCF FEDERATION IN THE GARD DEPARTMENT). NEWLY-WON COMMUNIST CITIES ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE "TECHNICAL EXPERTISE" OF EXPERIENCED PARTY MEMBERS WHO INVARIABLY ARRIVE ON THE LOCAL SCENE WITHIN DAYS, OR EVEN HOURS, OF AN ELECTORAL TRIUMPH. CENTRAL COMMITTEE SPECIALISTS IN PARIS LIKEWISE PROVIDE "ASSISTANCE" TO PCF MUNICIPALITIES, ESPECIALLY ON BUDGETARY MATTERS. NONETHELESS, THE MAYOR IS USUALLY A CRITICAL FACTOR IN COMMUNIST SUCCESS, AS SHOWN BY EMILE JOURDAN, MAYOR OF NIMES SINCE

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1965 (DEPUTY SINCE 1968), WHO REGULARLY DRAWS 6-7,000 MORE VOTES THAN THE PARTY AS A WHOLE. A MINER BY PROFESSION, JOURDAN IS A MAN OF THE PEOPLE WHOSE PERSONAL POPULARITY HAS BEEN EXPLOITED TO THE HILT. "HE'S EVERYWHERE", SAYS THE PREFECT, WHO LIKE ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE IN TOWN CONSIDERS JOURDAN A "COURAGEOUS GUY." REPLACING SUCH PERSONALITIES IS DIFFICULT, BUT THE PCF HAS SHOWN POLITICAL WISDOM IN SUBSTITUTING YOUNGER LEADERSHIP BEFORE THE OLD WAR HORSES HAVE COME TO THE END OF THE LINE AND AT A TIME WHEN MAXIMUM TRANSFER OF LOYALTY IS

ENCOURAGED BY FAVORABLE LOCAL CONDITIONS.

9. CREATION OF PCF CORES: PCF MUNICIPALITIES ALSO DRAW CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH FROM TIRELESS EFFORTS TO PENETRATE ALL ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY LIFE. WORKING FOR THE MOST PART THROUGH EXISTING ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNIST MILITANTS ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH ACTIVIST CORES IN THE ENTIRE GAMUT OF CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY, THUS GIVING THE PARTY REGULAR ACCESS TO THE POPULATION AND CREATING MORE WILLING PARTNERS IN THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS. CONTROL OF CITY HALL ALSO GIVES THE PARTY DIRECT LEVERAGE WITH REGARD TO SUCH PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS, SINCE VIRTUALLY ALL ARE DEPENDENT ON PUBLIC FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE WHICH VARIES ACCORDING TO THE DEGREE OF "COOPERATION" SHOWN BY THE ORGANIZATION. COMMUNIST MUNICIPAL ACTIVITIES ARE SKILFULLY COORDINATED WITH THESE GROUPS, AS WELL AS WITH OTHERS LIKE THE CGT, SO THAT PCF ADMINISTRATORS CAN APPEAR AS ONLY ONE ELEMENT IN A BROADER SOCIAL CONSENSUS AND LIKEWISE SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNPOPULAR PROGRAMS OR INITIATIVES.

10. MUNICIPAL MACHINERY IS FULLY ENGAGED IN THE CREATION OF PCF CORES, BEGINNING WITH NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITTEES OR "COMMITTEES OF GENERAL INTERESTS" WHICH OSTENSIBLY BRING MORE CITIZENS INTO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

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CESS, BUT SIMULTANEOUSLY PROVIDE THE PARTY WITH A PERMANENT PROPAGANDA FORUM FOR DEFENDING ITS OWN ACTIVITIES AND CRITICIZING ITS OPPOSITION. NIMES NOW HAS 48 SUCH COMMITTEES FOR A POPULATION OF 134,000. COMMUNIST CITIES ALSO INCLUDE AN UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBER OF EXTRA-MUNICIPAL COMMISSIONS WHICH INVOLVE PRESSURE GROUPS AND LOBBIES DIRECTLY IN CITY MANAGEMENT. THESE COMMISSIONS SATISFY AN INCREASING PUBLIC DEMAND FOR MORE PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEMONSTRATE PCF DEDICATION TO DEMOCRATIC CONSULTATION. THEY SELDOM POSE A REAL CHALLENGE, HOWEVER, TO COMMUNIST CONTROL SINCE MOST OF THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS ARE HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY PARTY ACTIVISTS AND LIKEWISE DEPENDENT ON CITY MONEY AND FACILITIES.

11. OTHER MUNICIPAL SERVICES PROVIDE LEVERAGE WHICH PC/

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ADMINISTRATIONS ARE ADEPT AT EXPLOITING. ONE OF THE
MOST IMPORTANT IS THE CONTROL OF LOW COST PUBLIC HOUS-

ING (HLM) PROJECTS WHICH PROVIDES THE PCF NOT ONLY WITH PATRONAGE IN ALLOCATING APARTMENTS TO PARTY SUPPORTERS (THE SAYING GOES "NO APARTMENT WITHOUT A PARTY CARD"), BUT ALSO FACILITATES THE EXTENSION OF PCF CORE ELEMENTS THROUGH THE SELECTIVE PLACEMENT OF PARTY CADRE. WALKING THROUGH ONE OF THE SEVERAL HLM GHETTOS WHICH SURROUND NIMES, A MAJORITY POLITICIAN COMMENTED THAT EVERY BUILDING MANAGER IS A PCF SUPPORTER AND THAT EVERY STAIRWELL CONTAINS AT LEAST ONE WELL-PLACED COMMUNIST SYMPATHIZER. THESE VAST COMPLEXES OF WORKING CLASS POPULATION IN NIMES ARE A VIRTUAL NO MAN'S LAND FOR MAJORITY PARTIES -- DURING NEARLY 90 MINUTES OF "CAMPAIGNING," THE GAULIST CANDIDATE TALKED TO EXACTLY TWO BUTCHERS AND TWO OLD LADIES, MEANWHILE AVOIDING CROWDS AND WORKERS LIKE THE PLAGUE. "WE'LL DO MAILINGS IN THESE AREAS," HE SAID.

12. HARD WORK AND DEDICATION: IN THE FACE OF INADEQUATE MAJORITY ORGANIZATION, COMMUNIST MILITANCY BECOMES AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN MAINTAINING AND EXTENDING PARTY INFLUENCE. PCF POLITICIANS AND CADRE BRING TOTAL DEDICATION TO THE JOB, CREATING A PERPETUAL MILITANT FERVOR WHICH, THROUGH SHEER PERSEVERANCE (ARRIVING EARLY FOR MEETINGS, STAYING LATER, ETC.), PAYS POLITICAL DIVIDENDS. THE PCF IS READY AND WILLING TO FILL EVERY POLITICAL VOID WHICH APPEARS ON THE LOCAL SCENE, RESPONDING WITH PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES GENERALLY UNMATCHED BY ANY OTHER PARTY. THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR HARD WORK AND IN THAT AREA THE PCF OFTEN HAS A NEAR MONOPOLY.
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13. A DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE?: ANY NUMBER OF OTHER FACTORS MIGHT BE MENTIONED IN EXPLAINING THE PHENOMENAL COMMUNIST RECORD IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS:

- EXPLOITATION OF LOCAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES, MOST IMPORTANTLY BY CHANNELLING CITY FUNDS TO THOSE ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING THE PARTY (CGT, WAR VETERANS, THE AGED, WOMEN, ETC.) AND BY AWARDING LOCAL CONTRACTS TO COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED BUSINESSES (CONSTRUCTION, SCHOOL SUPPLIES, TRAVEL AGENCIES);
- EXPANSION OF THE PARTY ORGANIZATION BY PLACING PCF MEMBERS ON THE CITY PAYROLL -- COMMUNIST MUNICIPALITIES REGULARLY SPEND 15-30 PERCENT MORE ON PERSONNEL THAN DO OTHER CITIES, THUS INCREASING THE EFFECTIVE NUMBER OF FULL-TIME PCF EMPLOYEES NATIONWIDE FROM THE 800 OFFICIALLY REPORTED TO SOMETHING CLOSER TO 8,000;

MORE GENERALLY, HOWEVER, PCF SUCCESS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO:

- FIRST, A STRATEGY OF SMALL, LOW-RISK BUT POPULAR LOCAL PROJECTS (AIMED AT IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND INCREASING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION) WHICH ALLOWS THE COMMUNISTS TO PRESENT A PROGRESSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC IMAGE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY BLAMING FAILURES AND CONSTRAINTS ON THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT;
- AND SECONDLY, SUPERIOR DEDICATION TO THE JOBS OF BOTH POLITICIAN (MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL) AND MILITANT, EXPLOITING LOCAL POSSIBILITIES TO THE HILT IN BUILDING COMMUNIST "CORES" IN EVERY SEGMENT OF COMMUNITY LIFE AND THUS PERPETUATING PCF CONTROL.

AS FOR THE FUTURE, NO OTHER PARTY HAS YET FOUND A POLITICAL RESPONSE CAPABLE OF BREAKING PCF DOMINATION OF ITS MUNICIPAL BASTIONS. THERE IS NEITHER SUFFICIENT
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MONEY, MILITANT ORGANIZATION, NOR DEDICATION IN OTHER POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS TO SERIOUSLY CHALLENGE THE COMMUNIST MACHINE, ONCE ESTABLISHED AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL -- AT LEAST AS LONG AS THE PCF RETAINS ITS OPPOSITION PURITY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND THE BASIC PROBLEMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT, INFLATION, ETC., CONTINUE TO PLAGUE THE PARTIES IN POWER.
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